

Local NASA interns aim high, far



THERESA LOCRASTO/Special Contributor

State Rep. Joe Driver of Garland (right) nominated (left to right) Kilian Cooley of Rowlett, Torrey Denson of Garland, Corinne Matthews of Sachse and Ashley Jump of Garland to NASA's High School Aerospace Scholars program. They'll be at Johnson Space Center later this month.

12:00 AM CDT on Sunday, June 15, 2008

By KAREN McDONOUGH / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News
Karen McDonough is a freelance writer in Frisco.

Four area students will be able to write "What I did this summer" essays about living on Mars.

That's the subject of the NASA High School Aerospace Scholars program that includes interns Kilian Cooley of Rowlett, a Garland High School student; Torrey Denson of Garland, North Garland High School; Ashley Jump of Garland, Dallas Christian Academy; and Corinne Matthews of Sachse, Sachse High School.

The one-week program is this month at the Johnson Space Center in Houston.

The seniors-to-be completed 10 Internet-based assignments during their junior year – spending three to four hours a week reading and writing about the history of the U.S. space program and their plan for a realistic mission to Mars. Corinne said that plan had to include time schedules, goals and details about the crew.

"They get the benefit of being hands-on, one-on-one, eye-to-eye with NASA astronauts that have been in space and people that have put other people in space," said state Rep. Joe Driver, who has been promoting the internship for about a dozen years.

Sending humans to the Red Planet is going to be a worldwide effort, Corinne said. She focused her "mission" assignment on creating a multinational crew of Americans, Canadians, Russians, Chinese and the EU Space Agency.

Along with the living on Mars exercise, the internship includes a tour of the space center. Students also sit in on briefings by noted NASA experts, including astronauts. It culminates with the students presenting their proposals at a luncheon for their parents, members of the Texas Legislature, Rotary clubs, NASA, and space center senior management.

"I think it'll be fun to present the culmination of five days of hard work," said Kilian, who wants to become an aerospace engineer.

"I'm hoping to learn more about NASA and meet more people and see if it's really what I want to do," Corinne said.

Interest in the program was meager in the Garland school district, Mr. Driver said, until a NASA representative gave a presentation to teachers and faculty.

Mr. Driver interviewed the top eight or nine applicants, and NASA officials pared it to the four who will join 346 others from around the state in the program.

Corinne attended a space camp at age 14, and said "the idea of being in space and being able to contribute to the exploration of space is really appealing.

"I want to be the first person on Mars. When I was little, we had to learn the names of the first people on the moon. I thought it would be cool to have everyone know my name," she said. "But later I realized that the idea of being part of history is important, and it's cool and inspiring to other people."

Karen McDonough is a freelance writer in Frisco.